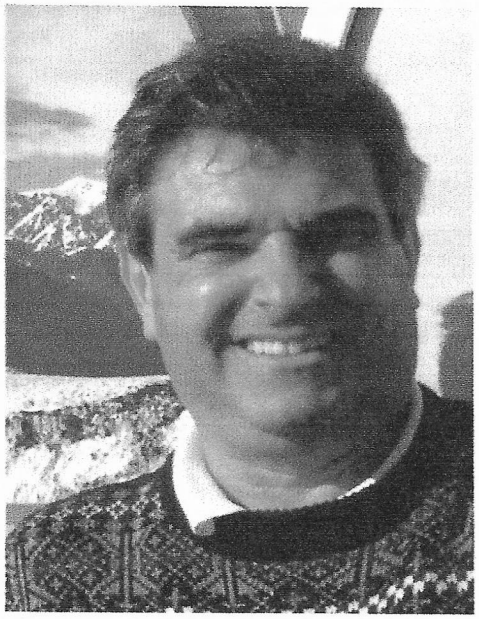

JOSEPH GIUSEPPE AYMAR EARNS MMR #513

I remember my grandmother walking hand in hand with me to my favorite spot overlooking the railroad station in my hometown of Pontremoli, Italy. I must have been four or five years old. I am told I would sit quietly, without uttering a word or moving a muscle, for two to three hours at a time just watching the trains in and out of the station. The hum of the electric locomotives intensified as they followed the rails beneath my dangling feet.

Later, in my pre-teen years, I would pore over the well-worn train catalog of the Lima Hobby train company, going through all five pages and memorizing what car or locomotive I would choose for my yearly gift celebrating my "name day" that falls on the 19th of March. I still treasure my very first metal stamped locomotive that ran on rails laid on cardboard ties.

My arrival in America at age 18 meant leaving all that behind. In my early 30s, I was given John Allen's book depicting the Gorre & Daphetid railroad; I was hooked. Using the photos in the book as a guide, I immediately started building a carbon copy of John's G&D original plan, even going as far as making up a cardboard mock-up with grades, just as John had done. I incorporated John's curved trestle and stone viaduct. By then, I was devouring all the articles on building layouts in *Model Railroader* and *Railroad Model Craftsman*. What a way to start a hobby.

I was always a lone wolf and an armchair modeler at best. Through my local hobby shop (Franciscan Hobbies in San Francisco, California), I heard of the 2000 NMRA National Convention with a Train Show in San Jose, a mere 80 miles away. I took my youngest son, Galen, and the two of us went on Saturday. By then, the contest room was almost devoid of models (*darn it!*), but we still saw a few of them —what an eye opener! At the National Train Show, Galen, who was 13 at the time, was given a hand-held throttle and was told he could run the train on the layout much to his delight. That gesture of reaching out to two strangers and making us feel welcome was the galvanizing moment. I liked this group of people and I wanted to be part of it. I have been a member of the NMRA ever since.

One year later, I discovered that I was part of what was called a "Region" (PCR), and a year after that, I learned I belonged to a Division (RED). By default, I started making some friends at Regional conventions and cementing those friendships at Division meetings. Boldly, I joined the Bakersfield Club (GEHAMS) 350 miles away because they took an interest in me as a person, and I still maintain my membership today; they helped me achieve my Certificate in Structures by allowing me to make all the bridges for the layout. And what a layout that is!

In 2005, I joined the Walnut Creek Model Railroad Club (only 75 miles from home) as a result of their sponsorship of the PCR Convention that year. With them, I earned my Dispatcher Certificate and many points toward author by writing about the club and member's activities in Regional newsletters. My timid behavior gave way to volunteering in any capacity.

I originally learned about the Achievement Program while in the contest room of a Regional convention and thought I would give it a try. I wanted to start slow and easy, so my first Certificate of Achievement was Motive Power — go figure! The AP was exactly what I needed; it coaxed me to expand my narrow horizons. While at first not an easy task, it became enjoyable writing articles, engaging in speaking in front of an audience, taking responsibility to run the contest room at the Division level — all this was new to me and was brought out by being engaged in the AP.

I slowly explored new frontiers, including learning about electronics; LEDs; and building with styrene, wood, and Strathmore Bristol board. The AP has shown me how varied and satisfying this hobby really is, and for that I am grateful! Thank you, NMRA, for your Achievement Program, and all the friends who have helped me in my journey. I will be there for you as you make your journey.

Joseph earned the following AP Certificates: Master Builder–Motive Power, Master Builder–Structures, Master Builder–Cars, Master Builder–Prototype Models, Association Volunteer, Model Railroad Author, and Chief Dispatcher.